Epilogue

"There is not much new to be told concerning the railroad strike," declared the *Pittsburgh Post* on August 1, 1877, as it proceeded to move the Russo-Turkish War into first place in the news. Nevertheless, for some time the *Post* and all other papers in the nation continued to devote a good deal of space to discussions of the Great Strike, both on a local and national level. Some papers ran columns entitled "Novelties of the Strike," which included such items as the fact that the strikers on the Vandalia line had told the manager that they would run passenger trains without pay, but had been refused; that in Newark, Ohio, the strikers and some businessmen had paid the Licking Valley Hotel bills of the soldiers who had left town out of sympathy with the strikers; that the railroad strikers in that same city, upon learning that eleven carloads of Shawnee and Straitsville miners were coming to do battle with four companies of militia brought in by Governor Thomas Young, had appointed a committee which intercepted the miners at Thornport (a Newark suburb) and persuaded them to go home; that striking railroaders in Columbus, Ohio, had proposed that if the strikers succeeded in winning their demands, they should contribute, on a

national scale, thirty-five to forty cents each per month to help pay for the millions of dollars worth of property destroyed during the upheaval; and that workingmen in various cities had posted notices outside the factories in which they worked, informing "tramps and dead beats" that they had volunteered to protect the property, and that the men warned should "keep clear of this place."[1] One paper even published a column entitled "Humors of the Strike." An example was the letter sent by "Many Employes" of the Union Railway and Transit Company of St. Louis to their superintendent, who happened to be named R.H. Shoemaker. It went:

> Dear Sir: "Awl" of the employes of this company do not wish to "strike," but will keep "pegging" away, provided you restore the "cut." Knowing you to be a whole "soled" fellow, we desire to "stick" to you to the "last." We know you belong to the "upper ten" of society and are, therefore, well "heeled." Now, in view of said facts, do not "tread" on our "toes." If you do, you may find it a "bootless" "task," for we shall "wax" wroth and the "end" is not yet. The boys East have "capped" the "business" and if they "tip" us the wink, we will "stretch" our "legs" and "foot" it across the "bridge," and lend them a helping hand. "Shoe" us soon what you intend to do.[2]

There was no humor, however, when the country looked back at the trail of bloodshed. Baltimore buried eleven of its citizens; Pittsburgh, forty-two; Reading, twelve; and in other cities and towns, funerals were held for citizens killed by police, militia, and federal troops. Over one hundred lives were lost, many of them innocent bystanders.[3]

For the living, too, there was little humor as the victors proceeded to punish the vanquished. During the first days of August, most workers returned to work. With few exceptions, they returned at the starvation wages that had triggered the Great Strike. Judged purely as a strike movement against wage cuts, the great upheaval

of 1877 had to be considered a dismal failure. In other respects, too, the labor rebellion seemed to have ended in what could only be called a defeat for the workers. On almost every railroad and in many shops and factories, strikers were fired and their leaders blacklisted. The New York Central, the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy, the Baltimore & Ohio, and the Pennsylvania Railroad alone fired hundreds of workers specifically for being strikers.[4]

Nor were the strikers the only ones to feel this type of repression. After they had refused to shoot down strikers, members of the Reading militia were dismissed by Governor Hartranft for "insubordination, cowardice and mutinous conduct," and newspapers reported gleefully that "these cowards have been dismissed by their employers."[5] The *New York Evening Post* called upon the federal government to mete out the same punishment to members of the Columbia Typographical Union, "composed almost exclusively of printers employed in the government printing office," because the union had dared to denounce the railroad corporations for their attempt "to reduce to a system of starvation a worthy class of employes, by cutting down to a small figure their present salaries," and had extended

> . . . a message of sympathy to all workingmen affected by the strike, and that we will sustain them by all legitimate means in our power to the final end, and wish them success in their great efforts to break down the barrier now sought to be erected by capital in order that labor may be degraded and crushed.

The *Evening Post* assured its readers: "The attention of President Hayes has been called to this, and to the fact that, while United States troops were trying to suppress rioting and anarchy, these printers in the employ of the government are encouraging the mob."[6]

Not content with dismissals and blacklists, however, the companies set about punishing the strikers in the courts. The Pennsylvania Railroad had more than a hundred of them arrested and thrown

into jail. The Baltimore & Ohio prosecuted thirteen of its workers for "inciting to riot," and the Philadelphia & Reading brought eight to trial. Railroads in receivership prosecuted several scores of strikers. The railroad companies, possessing as they did considerable influence over the appointment of judges, many of whom had been railroad lawyers, envisioned little difficulty in having these men put away for years. In this, they had the support of many of the nation's newspapers and periodicals. The *Independent*, whose role as a leading religious journal had not prevented it from calling for the wholesale slaughter of strikers during the Great Strike, now demanded years of "hard labor in state prisons" for the arrested men, "to furnish an example of the punitive power of the law."[7] But the *New York Sun*, in an editorial (probably written by John Swinton), called for a different policy:

> There is a strong disposition in some quarters to pursue these working men through the courts, and to make examples of all who can be reached, as a means of inspiring terror hereafter. He greatly misjudges American character who urges this kind of policy as wise. It would be the very height of unwisdom. Charges of conspiracy are easy to make and hard to prove. If made by the corporations against the laborers, the laborers might retaliate against the corporations, and in nine cases out of ten, the sympathy of the juries would be with them.
>
> This is a time for forbearance and conciliation. Both sides must give up something for the general good and for the peace of the community at large. Any vindictive prosecution which may aim to inspire alarm, will not only fail of the mark, but will leave a dangerous remembrance. Generosity will win more friends and secure better results than a stern assertion of the letter of the law against men who honestly believed they were contending for the bread of their wives and children.

Labor, a weekly journal published in Pittsburgh, was more to the point:

> Pittsburgh has taught the monopolists a lesson they will never forget. And the more they arrest, punish, imprison and persecute the men engaged in the late strikes, the worse it will be for them in the end. Every man that is unjustly punished for these offenses, has a thousand outside of prison walls pledged to avenge the outrages. The railroad managers had better employ the men at an increase of wages, than to arrest and imprison them. They are ten times more dangerous in the prison walls than they are outside at work. If these monopolists think they can promote their prosperity, and secure support of the people by such means, let them go on, and they will have something to learn yet.[8]

It appears that the judges took such warnings seriously. The situation was still too tense, and the sympathizers with the arrested men too numerous, to permit harsh punishments. While district attorneys charged that the defendants, exhibiting intelligence superior to that of the "lower class," were responsible for the labor upheaval and should be severely punished, judges sought not to exacerbate tensions—especially once the legal precedents for future action in strikes had been set. Thus, strikers arrested in Indianapolis and Chicago for halting freight traffic on railroads in receivership were given lectures by Judge Drummond on the meaning of contempt of court and, much to the fury of the railroad managers, were clapped into jail for only three months. Several strikers were charged by Drummond with the felony of interfering with the United States mails, but they got off lightly because he decided they had not done so with criminal intent. Strikers on the Indianapolis, Bloomington & Western Railway at Urbana, Illinois, were tried before Judge Samuel Hubbel Treat in Springfield. He found them guilty of criminal contempt (although he considered them guilty of criminal conspiracy, since they had by an "*unlawful combination*" stopped "the running of trains" in receivership) and sentenced them to ninety days in jail. The men arrested in East St. Louis were also tried before Judge Treat. Several of them had the charges against them nolle-prossed. Six others received ninety-day sentences. Barney

Donahue, the leader of the Erie strikers in Hornellsville, was convicted by Judge Jennings in New York City, not of contempt (although the Erie was in receivership), but of conspiracy, and sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

But none of the men involved in the cases of railroads in receivership remained in prison for long. On August 29 and 31, Drummond released the men convicted in Indianapolis and Chicago, and Treat and Jennings followed his example. All the convicted strikers were released on $500 recognizance each, with the requirement that they refrain for one year from interfering with property in control of the federal courts.

Where juries were involved, the outcome was even more lenient. Of the hundreds arrested in Pittsburgh, most were discharged at preliminary hearings, and all but a few of the remainder were given short terms in the workhouse. Of sixty-three indicted in Reading, only three were convicted. Hiram Nachtrieb, a discharged engineer, was acquitted. Franklin B. Gowen, determined to put Nachtrieb behind bars, had alleged him to be a ringleader of the strike. A week later, thirteen of the fourteen men accused of inciting to riot were acquitted, while the convicted man received a light sentence. As Ronald L. Filippeli points out in explaining the outcome in Reading, "The people of Reading knew that the behavior of the workers was the anguished cry of ordinary men, their neighbors, asserting their rights as human beings and free American citizens in the face of a corporate monopoly which in 1877 still seemed alien to the American spirit."[9]

In Harrisburg, where over sixty strikers had been arrested, all were only fined. The arrested members of the Carondelet executive committee were fined $100 each on such charges as "disturbing the peace" and "resisting an officer." Of the rank-and-file strikers arrested in St. Louis on riot charges, some were fined and, being unable to pay, were sentenced to short terms in the workhouse. A number of the cases were dismissed.[10]

On July 31, a warrant was sworn out charging Albert Currlin, Peter Lofgreen, and the other arrested leaders of the St. Louis strike

with the felony of riot "by forcibly compelling peaceful laboring men to quit their employment" on Tuesday, July 24, the day on which the executive committee of the Workingmen's Party had introduced the resolution for a general strike. Bail was set at $3,000 each, which their attorneys termed exorbitant. Currlin and Cope were released on bail, while the others remained in jail awaiting trial.[11]

After his release, Currlin was interviewed in his home by a reporter for the *St. Louis Times*. The interview was headed "Albert the Agitator," but it might more correctly have been labeled "Albert the Racist Condemns the Working Masses of St. Louis." Currlin's remarks during this interview, which have been referred to earlier, were shot through with insulting attacks on "niggers" who, he charged, had pushed their way, uninvited, into the ranks of the strikers, had forgotten their "place" in St. Louis society, and had tried to play a leading role in the processions. As a result, the community had received the impression that the general strike, led by the Workingmen's Party, was a plot to undermine white supremacy. As indicated above, Currlin proudly told the reporter that the party had worked hard to influence the white strikers to break off all connections with them.

Currlin defended the decision to call off all mass meetings with the claim that the executive committee had had no intention of allowing the general strike to turn into a violent uprising. When this tendency began to manifest itself, he and other members of the committee had gone to Mayor Overstolz and assured him that the party would not allow "the mob" to take over and push the strike in a violent direction—"that we, as a committee, and our party, as an organization, had nothing to do with them; that we were not responsible for such acts; and our principles opposed such. We told him that we were anxious, for the credit of ourselves and the party, to suppress such outrages." This was the reason, Currlin said, that the committee had decided to put an end to all mass meetings.

Finally, in keeping with this outlook, Currlin reported, the executive committee had informed the mass of workers gathered at

the Friday, July 27, meeting at Schuler's Hall that "we were not thinking of fighting; that if the police came—and everybody was saying they were coming—we would give up right away. We didn't mean to fight, and wouldn't fight, and that our principles taught us different."[12]

A somewhat different note was struck by Joseph N. Glenn, one of the executive committee members still in jail. In a letter to the *National Labor Tribune* headed "St Louis Jail, Aug. 8, 1877," he began:

> I am incarcerated here for addressing workingmen in St. Louis on the importance of "Trade Unions," and lecturing on the principles and platform of the W[orkingmen's] P[arty]. I addressed sixteen different meetings during the strike and had detectives on my track all the time. The charges preferred against me are "inciting to riot," and I am held in $3,000 bond. I am to be tried Friday and expect to be acquitted. After our arrest the military fired a salute in honor of the victory of capital over labor.[13]

In mid-August, the members of the executive committee were brought to trial. The court proceedings were brief. The prosecuting attorney asked for more time to round up witnesses, whereupon counsel for the defense objected that the ten days already elapsed since the warrants had been served were time enough. The court upheld this contention. Thereupon, the prosecuting attorney declared that he was obliged to enter a *nolle prosequi* in all the cases. This had the effect of freeing the defendants, but was not equivalent to acquittal, nor did it bar the possibility of future action against them. In October, the grand jury was instructed to look into the disturbances of the past summer to see if further legal action was warranted. That body reported that it was "compelled, although reluctantly, to see those who were most guilty, and who had been instrumental in bringing all this trouble upon the city, escape any punishment whatsoever." The jury explained its inability to act on the ground that grave doubt existed as to the constitutionality of

the law that had been relied upon to punish the strike leaders.[14]

At President Hayes's last important cabinet meeting during the Great Strike, on Tuesday, July 31, the discussion had turned to possible remedies. That very morning, the *Chicago Tribune*, in an editorial entitled "National Legislation for Railroads," had broached the issue of a federal law to assist the railroads during strikes. In it, it emphasized how public the nation's roads had become, and how great, therefore, was their need for such legislation.[15] The cabinet decided to discuss the matter after Secretary of the Treasury John Sherman had brought it up. He explained the extent and importance of the country's railroad network and said that both demonstrated "a need for national action."[16] Secretary of the Navy Richard W. Thompson suggested that contracts be entered into between the government and the railroad magnates, but Secretary of State Evarts quickly pointed out the social pitfalls involved in this suggestion, and the idea was shelved. Evarts did concede, however, that "the country is ready for an exertion of this power,"[17] but no one seemed willing to say just what form the "exertion" should take.

Hayes sat listening quietly. The meeting adjourned without reaching a decision, but later, on August 5, he wrote in his diary, after his previously cited observation that the strikers had been put down *"by force"*:

> . . . but now for the real remedy. Can't something [be] done by education of the strikers, by judicious control of the capitalists, by wise general policy to end or diminish the evil? The railroad strikers as a rule are good men, sober, intelligent and industrious.[18]

This was the only conclusion drawn by the president of the United States after the greatest labor upheaval that had taken place up to that time in American history, and even then, he never elaborated on these ideas in public.

But with the strike over, with the dead buried and the ashes swept away, with the stock market on the rise once again, and with "fi-

nancial people abroad" assured "that the U.S. Government . . . can and will maintain order," the issues raised by the upheaval still kept making themselves felt. For several weeks, two questions ran like a refrain through the press: "What did it mean?" and "How can we prevent similar upheavals in the future?" Some saw the Great Strike only in terms of the loss of wages and the future taxes that the strikers and others would have to pay for the destruction they had wrought. The *St. Louis Missouri Republican*, for example, noted with considerable glee: "Society is but an endless circle, and the losses which the mob have inflicted upon the railroads . . . will but follow the circle around to return with force upon the originators." Temperance organizations blamed the upheaval on "idle and vicious young men" who were alcohol corrupted.[19] But most of the nation's press viewed the events of the latter part of July as reflecting the dangers of trade unionism and communism, which it linked together. "The formidable insurrection of different classes of laborers along the principal railroads in the Northern and Middle States," the *Galveston Daily News* declared in an editorial entitled "Trade Union Fallacies," "may be regarded as a logical outcome of ideas inculcated and habits acquired in the trade unions to which the insurgents belong." The fact that most of the strikers did not belong to any trade unions made no difference to the Texas paper, and it concluded that "the trade unions which spread the ideas that had given birth to the insurrection were themselves infiltrated by Communists."[20] The *Philadelphia Ledger* congratulated its southern colleague on its astuteness, and pointed out that the police of the City of Brotherly Love had concrete evidence to prove the charge. It was clear, it went on, "that when the whole history of the uprising becomes to be known, it will be found that the secret inspiration of it will be discovered in the famous International Society, which played such havoc in Paris when they had the upper hand there."[21] If the Great Strike proved anything, declared the *Washington National Republican*, it was that "Communistic ideas are now widely entertained in America."[22]

But there were both groups and individuals who rejected such

simplistic interpretations. "The Commune Nonsense," insisted the *Pittsburgh Post,* was simply a way of "alarming timid people, by insinuating that the American working classes are influenced by the teachings of the Paris Commune." The truth was that "the strike originated in well ascertained grievances," and, as far as Pittsburgh was concerned, no evidence had ever been furnished to prove that a single communist had had anything to do with it.[23] A writer who had journeyed through the states in which the troubles had occurred made the same point in an article on "The Truth About the Strike" in the *Galaxy.* He was convinced that if "the readers of daily newspapers could only see the leaders of these movements [the local strikes] shorn of the coloring of special dispatches, the 'terrible communist element in the United States' would serve only to scare children and stir up alarm in the hearts of nervous old ladies." And he concluded: "To construe the uprising as the result of the presence of a communistic element . . . is something that the facts in the case do not warrant."[24]

In answer to an article by W.W. Grosvenor entitled "The Communist and the Railway," in which the writer had attacked the striking workingmen as being communists, a correspondent who described himself as "A Red-Hot Striker," retorted graphically:

> You challenge me to compare "the Communist and the Railway." The way to do it is, first to see what is the idea of both, what each of them demands. Now, I say,—and I challenge you, or any other fellow like you, to show I'm not right,—I say the "Commune" *represents the cause of the poor in this: that its object is to give every human born into this world a chance to live; live long, and die well.* And I say of the "Railway," it *represents the few rich who don't want everybody to have a chance for a decent living, but intend to grind out of the rest of the world all the wealth possible for their own special benefit.* I say this, and don't fear you can show the contrary. The difference is, the one is struggling to make it possible for all the world to get on; the other is doing its damnedest to make it impossible for anybody to get on, save the few rich

> it represents. Let the public judge which side is most worthy,—as it will judge in good time, and don't you forget it.[25]

Another colorful reply by a striker appeared in the "Workingmen's Ten Commandments," "as written down in the statute book of railroad officials, idle monopolies and Jay Gould aristocrats." The third commandment read:

> Thou shalt not serve any other master, neither work for any more pay than I give, for I am a jealous master; I will have you discharged on the least provocation, and half starve your wife and children, *and have you punished as a communist,* and not treat you as becomes an American citizen, but as a tramp and a vagabond.[26]

While the debate over trade unionism and communism raged in the press, business leaders and chambers of commerce were busy drawing up proposals calling for more restrictive legislation against "tramps," the poor, and strikers, and for greater limitations upon the suffrage. They also demanded a strengthening of the police, the state militia, and the United States Army in preparation for future conflicts. Within two weeks of the Great Strike, plans were under way to augment the Chicago police and the Illinois militia. Governor Hartranft of Pennsylvania completely reorganized that state's National Guard, discarding fancy uniforms and increasing the expenditures for Gatling guns. He also took the precaution of weeding out companies that might be sympathetic to strikers in the future, and mustered out a few major generals as well. Other states followed suit. In November, the War Department published a manual on "Riot Duty," and one private citizen issued, at his own expense, a pamphlet called *Suggestions Upon the Strategy of Street Fighting.*[27]

One labor advocate wrote exultantly: "More sacred in history than Lexington or Yorktown will be the ground where militia men stacked their arms, refusing to fire on the insurgents."[28] Business

groups and their spokesmen did not share his enthusiasm. Of the 45,000 militia in eleven states estimated to have been involved in suppressing the Great Strike they had praise for only a small fraction.[29] Such prominent Americans as Horace White, Carl Schurz, and Thomas A. Scott all united in emphasizing the inadequacy of the local militia and the need for a large standing army if the United States was to avoid the horrors of the Paris Commune. The *Nation* pointed out that the militia was no substitute for a well-trained army, for in many cases the local militia had sympathized with the strikers. This theme received sensational support in a small booklet published shortly after the strike entitled *The Commune in 1880: Downfall of the Republic.* Its author ("Spectator") described in fiction to his father, who had left the country early in 1877, "the dreadful story" of the Great Strike that had led to the establishment of a Commune in the United States. The fatal weakness of the forces fighting the communist strikers, according to "Spectator," was that the militia was infiltrated with their agents and sympathizers:

> If we could only have had a free well-drilled anti-communist militia! Our greatest safety, however, would have been the regulars. With a regular army of one hundred thousand men that uprising would never have taken place. One thousand regular troops in the city of New York would have been a more efficient force than ten thousand militia. Militia are good, but the real safety of a country lies in her regular army.[30]

But there was by no means unanimous support for the demand for a large standing army. The labor press bitterly opposed it. "Labor refuses to be fettered with the shackles with which capital seeks to enthrall it," cried the *Locomotive Firemen's Magazine,* in explaining the move to strengthen the army. The *National Labor Tribune* added:

> What they demand is a well organized body of trained soldiers, who know and care nothing about the grievances of the

> people, and who stand ready to defend railroad and other corporations in their career of plunder and oppression.

The *Philadelphia Commonwealth* dubbed the proposal by "Mr. Hayes and his railway managers" nothing but a means of getting ready to crush out all types of protest. The *Pittsburgh Post* called the "cry for a large army" a "superficial" way of solving deep-rooted social evils; the *New York Sun* characterized it as "nothing less than a radical revolution of our whole republican system of government"; and even the *Commercial and Financial Chronicle* came out against the whole idea, fearing that a large, permanent standing army could be used as a weapon "against business itself." The sharpest criticism appears to have come from the *Cincinnati Enquirer,* which expressed its own shock at the fact that the idea of raising and equipping a standing army "for the sole purpose of suppressing strikes nowhere seems to create a shock":

> The sad spectacle is presented in this broad, free land, longing for labor, of a government with one hand driving laboring men to desperation, with the other bayoneting back their acts of despair, of a Congress enacting laws, whose results it must raise a standing army to smother; of a great and peaceful republic whose legislation necessarily leads to insurrection and anarchy unless supported by arms! How long will our Congress continue to enact starvation and send it forth in statutes only to be compelled to raise an army to batter down the consequences of the hunger and want it has enacted?

Mark Twain put it more tersely when he wrote to Mrs. Fairbanks on August 6, 1877: "Pittsburgh and the riots neither surprised nor disturbed me; for where the government is a sham, one must expect such things."[31]

But there were also other reactions to the events of the Great Strike. As early as 1875, a small group of German socialists in Chicago had formed an armed club, *Lehr und Wehr Verein,* to defend

workers from attacks by the police. Now, after the brutal attack on the cabinetmakers in Chicago's Turner Hall and the proposals for the strengthening of the police and the militia, the armed club movement was expanded to meet the new threat. However, by an act of 1879, the state put an end to these activities by making it illegal for any "unofficial" body to form a military organization. The legislation did nothing to impede the right of "official" bodies, sponsored by the wealthy classes, to organize armed units. Thus, a "Military Committee" formed by Chicago's businessmen raised $30,000 by 1880, built an armory, and levied taxes for its support. This was a reflection of a national trend. The move to strengthen the United States Army and to hasten the construction of numerous well-equipped armories in the large urban areas of the United States dates from 1877.[32]

The advocates of a larger army and more effective militias were largely successful in their efforts, but some conservatives began to ask whether military preparations alone were enough to serve as a "preventive cure." The *Railroad Gazette* advanced the idea that American businessmen were deluding themselves if they believed that repressive measures would guarantee them security from future labor struggles:

> There is a delusion prevalent among railroad officials and the community generally that a strike is an abnormal condition of things, somewhat like a pestilence or an invasion of potato bugs, and that if we could only employ sufficiently destructive means to kill the bugs . . . we would always be free from the evil.

While the *Gazette* took the position that nothing really could prevent strikes in the future ("Strikes are inseparably associated with our present economy and must be regarded as the natural outgrowth of the existing relations between employers and employed"),[33] there were those who believed that armory building, strengthening the militias and the army for riot duty, and other repressive measures must be accompanied by a program to improve labor morale, both

spiritually and materially. A Chicago minister who served on a committee to strengthen the militia sermonized: "These laboring men, so narrow and selfish in their views and so violent in their proceedings, these tramps and bummers and thieves, the very sight of whom are a disgust, are . . . members of the same communities with us. In some sense we are responsible for their souls; responsible, at least, to do all we can to raise them out of ignorance and woe." Within a year after the Great Strike, the Chicago middle class had mobilized a broad reform movement involving the church, temperance organizations, Christian missions, and educational reformers, as a "preventive cure" to accompany their military preparations.[34]

The railroads were quick to pick up the idea. Thomas Scott acknowledged that the Great Strike had brought new issues to the fore, and in a letter to the *North American Review* in August 1877 he pointed out: "Now, for the first time in American history, has an organized mob learned its power to terrorize the law-abiding citizens of great communities."[35] Even as he was pleading for greater federal assistance to railroads to meet this threat, Scott himself set aside $3,000 to distribute among those employees who had remained "loyal" during the strike.[36] To be sure, this was a paltry sum compared with Vanderbilt's $100,000, but then, unlike Vanderbilt, Scott had deluded neither himself nor others concerning the number of his "loyal employees." Vanderbilt, for his part, rescinded half of the 10 percent wage cut in October. President Robert Harris, of the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad, over the protests of his subordinates, proposed a graduated wage scale for engineers according to length of service, as an incentive. He further suggested that the company should provide a ninety-day notice before discharging any worker, and then only for violations of a contract which the workers would sign upon being hired. Finally, Harris sought to abandon Sunday freight service in order to give his workers a day of rest.[37] Other companies made similar proposals. The Leigh Valley set up a workers' relief fund and matched the employees' contributions. The Central Pacific opened a hospital for sick or injured employees, and Charles Francis Adams argued for sickness and

accident insurance plans as a means of eliminating the need for unions.[38] Vice-President William Ackerman of the Illinois Central even began arguing for an eight-hour day for his men, and went so far as to propose both life tenure and compensation for accidents for all classes of employees.[39]

On the political front, too, both parties began proposing measures aimed at ameliorating the conditions of the workingmen as a protection against future outbreaks. The Ohio Republican platform for the fall election of 1877 included a plank for the establishment of a national bureau of industry. The measure, proposed by Senator Stanley Mathews, would enable workers to communicate their views to the government without fear of being regarded as outlaws or outcasts, and Congress would enforce such reasonable regulations as would tend to secure a fair return for invested capital, while at the same time ensuring equitable wages for employees. Judge West, the Republican nominee for governor of Ohio, went even further and called for a minimum wage for labor, which would be supplemented at the end of each year by a dividend out of the profits of the business. The Democrats, for their part, put forth a suggestion the following spring for a law "for the ventilation of coal mines—one that would be just to the miner and to the owner."[40]

These proposals were too much for a press that still believed that repression was the only valid way to prevent future upheavals. The *Nation,* a typical representative of this viewpoint, condemned equally the Ohio Republican platform, Senator Mathews, and Judge West. The latter was portrayed as advocating measures that were "the essence of the doctrines proclaimed by the bedlamites of the several French Revolutions, and their last expression—the last before the regime of street barricades and petroleum." Turning to Senator Mathews, the journal inquired sarcastically whether he also wished to support those who were doing nothing, in addition to helping those whose wages were low:

> Taxing all for the support of all is a principle in which any communard of the Old World can serve as preceptor to Senator

> Mathews, and one which the people of Ohio should be warned not to import in any of the disguises which candidates for office may seek to array it.

Harper's Weekly also attacked the Ohio senator on the ground that his measures were "un-American," because they involved "a total misconception of the function of government and of the conditions of a republic. They logically end in 'national workshops and Communism.'"[41]

Meanwhile, a number of midwest Republicans, including Riley McKeen, president of the Vandalia line, Secretary of the Navy Richard W. Thompson, and Judge Walter Q. Gresham, were privately discussing the possibility of capturing the 1880 Republican presidential nomination for Ulysses S. Grant, since they felt they needed a strong military president to meet the problem of future labor unrest.[42]

As one student of the Great Strike has pointed out, the policies of the railroad companies and the legislative proposals following the upheaval are indicative of a dawning recognition of the need to move "in the direction of assisting the worker."[43] Yet it is clear that there were still powerful forces that feared such concessions and that clung to the view that repression alone could prevent future outbreaks. What the railroad managers and politicians like Mathews and West understood, and what the spokesmen for the "repression school" failed to grasp, was that even though the Great Strike had ended in what appeared to be total defeat for the workers, the uprising had actually strengthened the labor and socialist movements. Therefore, the interests of the capitalists would be better served by a policy of granting some concessions to the workers than by one that relied upon repression alone.

In an editorial entitled "The Dangerous Classes," published a few days after the strikes were crushed, the *Chicago Tribune* argued that the upheaval had revealed that the American social order was developing in a manner similar to those of European industrial societies:

> We, too, have our crowded tenement houses, and our entire streets and neighborhoods occupied by paupers and thieves. . . . The extremes of wealth and poverty are now to be seen here as abroad: the rich growing richer and the poor poorer—a fact to tempt disorder.

And—most important of all—"We now have the Communists on our soil."[44]

Of course, they had been there long before, but they had been unable, to any great extent, to reach the American workers. Speaking of the situation in the Workingmen's Party of the United States before the strikes of 1877, Robert Schilling wrote a decade later:

> We called public meetings in all parts of the country, but the masses were slow to move. Oft-times, after posting bills and paying for advertising, we were also compelled to contribute our last nickel for hall rent and walk home instead of ride.[45]

To a marked degree, the Great Strike changed all this. "The industrial disturbances of 1877, the first great manifestation of industrial and social unrest in this country," wrote Thomas J. Morgan of the Chicago WPUS, "gave us the sympathetic ear of the discontented toiler."[46]

In the course of the strikes, as we have seen, party leaders addressed large audiences—sometimes as many as ten thousand—and were able to reach more American workers in two weeks than socialists in this country had in two-score years before. Moreover, the party speakers made it quite clear that they were speaking for a socialist movement. "I would have you understand that what I say tonight," declared Albert R. Parsons to more than ten thousand workers at the Chicago meeting of July 24, "is not as an individual, but as a member of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. *(Loud applause.)* What I say represents the principles, platform, and performances of the Workingmen's Party of the United States."[47] For the first time, many workers heard discussions about the nature

of the capitalist system and how socialism intended to solve many of these problems; how the government was controlled by the capitalists; and how the press served the interests of the corporations. The workers' own experiences during the Great Strike lent credence to the analysis provided by the WPUS spokesmen. Small wonder, then, that the party enjoyed both an increase in enrollment and a growth in its press circulation.[48] However, the ones who profited most from this development were the Lassalleans.

During the strikes, the Marxists had presented resolutions at WPUS meetings which, after expressing sympathy for the strikers and opposition to the use of force against them, declared

> That it is the imperative duty of all workmen to organize in trade unions and to aid in establishing a National Federation of all trades so that combined capital can be successfully resisted and overcome.[49]

Once the strikes were over, the Marxists insisted that the next immediate task was to create such a national federation of trade unions, with the eight-hour day as the unifying issue. Executive committees set up during the struggle, and scattered mass meetings were not enough, they argued. Strikers with hungry families to feed required swift relief payments, and hastily established committees could not meet this need. The strikes had demonstrated the indispensability of trade unions capable of holding out against the combined employer-government offensive.

The Marxists also maintained that the strikes had also proven that skilled and unskilled, employed and unemployed, Black and white, American- and foreign-born, men and women—all could join together in a common struggle against the common enemy. Thus, it was possible to build a labor movement that would unite these different sections of the working class for the first time in American history.[50]

But the Marxists were aware of the fact that the strike experience had also given impetus to the "political socialists," to the advocates

of greenbacks, and to other reformers. J.P. McDonnell warned the workers not to lend an ear to

> . . . the men who, in this favored hour, take hurried steps to catch the rising tide, who talk politics, claptrap and labor buncombe and refer to trade unions with faint praise, and who a few months ago held them up to public condemnation. Stand by the tried and true who never fail in darkness or in storm, stand by the Labor Press, and above all stand by your unions. There are no organizations so feared as the trades unions.[51]

McDonnell, however, was whistling in the dark. The rush into politics was on, and nothing the Marxists said could halt it. Nor is this surprising. In the aftermath of the strikes, employers throughout the nation used the blacklist with great effect in weeding out strikers and union members from their labor force. The fledgling unions had no resources with which to fight organized capital, and many simply disintegrated before the employer onslaught. In late 1877, the *Labor Standard* was able to list only nine national unions as still functioning, and most of them existed more in name than in fact. Yet the forces unleashed by the strike could not wait for a new resurgence of unions. What good would it do to build unions if the government remained under the complete control of the capitalists? the Lassalleans asked. "The strikes have demonstrated more clearly than ever," wrote one of their organs, "that the corporations have the law on their side; they own the legislatures, they control most of the newspapers, and manufacture public opinion." Of what value would unions be if the corporations, by means of this control, were able to bring in armed forces to crush labor's struggles? The Lassalleans also argued that even without unions, the Great Strike could have been won if the workers had had political power: "Had the governors of the states kept their hands off for a few days, the strikers would have forced the railroads to pay them living wages." But since the strikers had no effective political influence, these officials had felt free to rescue the railroads from certain defeat.[52]

But, the argument continued, greater danger lay ahead for the workers unless they gained political power. Already the capitalists were strengthening the police, the state militias, and the United States Army. Already there was increased talk of limiting the suffrage to the educated, and businessmen were applauding George Vest of Missouri for having said that "universal suffrage is a standing menace to all stable and good government. Its twin sister is the Commune with its labor unions, etc., etc." If the workers waited for a new union resurgence, they would find themselves so limited in what they could do that the unions would prove to be useless. In short, working class control of government was a prelude to effective trade unionism, rather than the other way around, as the Marxists claimed.[53]

It is not surprising, then, that in the context of the atmosphere existing in the period after the 1877 strike, the trend in the WPUS was toward political action. Within a few weeks after the Great Strike, sections of the party began preparing for the upcoming campaigns of the summer and fall of 1877.

The Louisville sections were the first to act. On August 1, barely a week before the election for members of the state legislature, they held a mass meeting, drew up a platform, and nominated candidates. The platform began with the statement that since "the two political parties of the United States, within the past eight or ten years, have failed to legislate in behalf of the working class of people," the working people of the city of Louisville have decided to "repudiate the Democratic and Republican Parties," and recommended similar action by "the industrial classes of the Union." Specifically, the platform called for an eight-hour day; the arbitration of disputes between capital and labor; prohibition of the use of prison labor by private employers; prohibition of labor by children under fourteen years of age; compulsory education with "the liberal application of funds for educational purposes"; reduction of taxation and economy in all governmental expenses—federal, state, or municipal; a tariff for revenue only, and "an absolute abolition of duties upon the necessities of life, the burden of which is borne by the

poorer classes"; opposition to class legislation; and a firm refusal to support professional politicians. But the first plank in the platform read: "A better financial policy than the one which has impoverished the masses, brought utter stagnation upon commerce, and thrown out of employment millions of people." The plank was inserted at the insistence of the greenbackers, who had joined forces with the Workingmen's Party, and was readily accepted by the Lassalleans who dominated the local WPUS. The Marxists were unable to keep this plank out of the platform, but they did succeed in having a plank included that read: "No man shall be put in nomination save he be a workingman."[54] Consequently, all of the candidates nominated for the state legislature were workers, and they ran on the Workingmen's ticket.

The immense mass meeting which adopted the platform and fielded the candidates of the Workingmen's Party amazed the *Louisville Courier-Journal,* and it began to devote almost its entire editorial page until election day to appeals to the workingmen not to support the "New Political Party." At first it relied on reason and logic. "The effort of workingmen to seek improvement of their condition by an appeal to the ballot rather than by appeal to violence is certainly a manifestation of intelligence and right feeling," it editorialized. It even conceded that "some grievous error lies at the bottom of the present condition of affairs in this country," and acknowledged that some of the new party's planks had something one could "commend," insofar as they were directed toward correcting aspects of this "grievous error." But it insisted that the best way to achieve reform was through the existing parties, which, after all, had the power to enact such legislation. For the workingman to place his reliance on an inexperienced political entity would be a "grave mistake."[55]

But as election day approached and the response to the Workingmen's Party in Louisville's working class districts appeared to be increasing, the *Courier-Journal* threw logic and reason to the winds and concentrated exclusively on the danger that a victory for the Workingmen's ticket would be followed by a "Kentucky Com-

mune": "Its success will be the signal for all the secret societies of Communists in this country and abroad to head for our fair state and begin their work of wreckage. The duty of the peace-promoting and order-loving citizens is plain. They must vote for men who are upholders of civilization."[56]

When the returns were in, it was clear that the workingmen of Louisville had not been intimidated. "The Workingmen Win," read the horrified headline in the *Courier-Journal*, and its report continued: "The returns show that the workingmen swept the city save in two wards." A few days later, it reported the official vote: "The total vote cast in the city was 13,578, this being in the Legislative race, in which the Workingmen cast 8,850 votes to 4,728 by the opposition, leaving a total majority for the Workingmen of 4,132." The Workingmen's Party elected five out of seven candidates, and its vote placed it ahead of the Democrats.[57]

The *Courier-Journal* blamed "the criminal apathy of conservative men" for the victory "of what is essentially a mob movement." In a calmer mood, it observed:

> Its victory followed on the heels of the late strike, of which it is the representative and is a reflection of the bitterness of the defeated strikers. It will surely, unfortunately, have a profound effect wherever the strike made itself felt.[58]

It was an accurate prediction. Inspired by the news from Louisville, Workingmen's Party tickets were nominated in city after city, especially where there were socialist sections. A somewhat astounded *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* reported on its front page:

> The Democrats were disastrously defeated in Louisville . . . , the Workingmen's ticket carrying five out of seven districts in the race for the next Legislature. . . . Workingmen turned out *en masse*, and carried the day handsomely. They allowed no buying of votes, either bluffing off or arresting anyone so attempting.

The *Globe-Democrat* predicted that it would not be long before the shattered Workingmen's Party would renew its activities in St. Louis.[59]

Once again, the prediction proved accurate. On September 3, under the same leadership that had led the general strike, the party held a mass meeting at Lucas Market, which attracted a crowd of two or three thousand, and announced that it would place a ticket in the field during the October city election of school directors.[60]

The headlines in the newspapers of cities that had been centers of the Great Strike read: "The political striker has taken the place of the railroad striker," and "Workingmen Earnestly Preparing and Organizing for Thorough Work at the Ballot Box." One interesting headline read: "Hayes Denounced At Home." The dispatch was from Columbus, Ohio, Hayes's home state, and reported:

> A mass meeting of workingmen adopted resolutions denouncing the Republican and Democratic parties and Hayes' administration, and appointed an Executive Committee to take steps toward calling state and county conventions, to nominate a full Workingmen's ticket.[61]

In several cities, socialists and other groups nominated joint tickets. Most often, the socialists and greenbackers joined forces, and the platform which resulted included a demand for greenbacks as well as planks calling for the eight-hour day, abolition of child labor, compulsory education, and several others patterned after the Louisville platform.[62] In Chicago, the Workingmen's Party united with reformers who advocated a change in taxation procedures of the city so that wealthy citizens would not escape their fair share.[63]

An interesting feature of the WPUS electoral campaigns in 1877 was the effort to establish Black-white unity. In Maryland, the Workingmen's Party appealed to workers and all other citizens "without regard to race, nationality or political creed," to support its candidates.[64] In Cincinnati, the party nominated Peter H. Clark for state

superintendent of schools. The other candidates on the socialist ticket were an American-born white, a Bohemian, a German cigarmaker, and an Irish stonecutter. But the socialist *Emancipator* called for special efforts to pile up a big vote for the Black candidate:

> Peter H. Clark, of all the candidates on the ticket, most thoroughly represents the contest between laborers and capitalists, of the proscribed race, whose sorrows made the name of the United States the synonym of robbery and murder throughout the world; his nomination is therefore above all the finest vindication of the claim that the Workingmen's Party is a purely cosmopolitan organization.
>
> But a long time since this man of learning and culture, now the principal of our colored schools, was a youth, on the streets of Cincinnati battling for a living as a newspaper carrier, hated and proscribed because he belonged to a class whose labors had opened every field in the South, and whose woes and miseries had ladened every breeze with appeals to the hearts of the just for the wrong and injustice of slavery, to be lifted off of Africa's outraged sons and daughters. . . .[65]

Clark campaigned enthusiastically for the Workingmen's Party. That summer and fall, he spoke for the socialists in Louisville and in Jeffersonville, Indiana. A Louisville socialist wrote: "Clark for reasoning can't be beat." Clark's "reasoning" consisted of pointing out to working class audiences that the Great Strike had proved the socialist contention that the local, state, and national governments of the United States were controlled by, of, and for the capitalists, and that, just as the capitalists were preparing for future labor conflicts by building up the armed forces, so the workers should prepare by electing socialists to office to guarantee that these forces would not be used to break strikes.[66]

The candidates nominated for the autumn election by the WPUS local sections met with considerable success at the polls. The approximate vote was: in Chicago, 7,000; Cincinnati (where Clark ran

ahead of the entire ticket), 9,000; Buffalo, 6,000; Milwaukee, 1,500; New York, 1,800; Brooklyn, 1,200; New Haven, 1,600; and Detroit, 800.[67] In St. Louis, the Workingmen's Party elected its candidates in five of the twenty-eight wards—"a surprising victory for a Party which only two months previously had been denounced as beyond the pale of civilized society!"[68]

However, it was the emerging Greenback-Labor Party, and not the WPUS, that reaped the greatest benefit from the working class's turn to independent political action following the Great Strike. The workers' parties which sprang up all over the country, in almost every industrial center between New York and San Francisco, were at first independent of the Greenback Party, founded in 1875. Soon, however, a great many of them merged with the greenbackers because of the close relationships that had been built up during the strikes between the workers, farmers, and small businessmen. The farmers had demonstrated their solidarity with the strikers in their battle against the hated railroad corporations by supplying strikers' relief stores with food in several communities.[69]

The first Greenback-Labor fusion took place in Pennsylvania, in the very heart of the district where the strike had been most extensive and violent. On August 13, 1877, a meeting in Pittsburgh, sponsored by trade unions, formed the United Labor Party. Its platform included the typical demand of the greenbackers—currency reform—and called for protective tariff legislation, labor bureaus in the state and national governments, the abolition of contract convict labor, workmen's compensation legislation, child labor laws, the abolition of conspiracy laws applying to labor organizations, the distribution of public lands to settlers only, and the establishment of courts of arbitration for the settlement of disputes between labor and capital.[70]

Late in August, the Greenback Party of Pennsylvania and the United Labor Party appointed a joint committee to merge the two parties and write a common platform. The platform that emerged from this conference kept the original financial demands of the Greenback Party and added a number of the labor demands raised

by the United Labor Party. The two parties then fused. Most of the candidates nominated for office had been nominated a few weeks earlier by the Greenback Party, but a number of labor men were added to the ticket. Most of the labor candidates who ran for office under the Greenback-Labor emblem had been strike leaders.[71]

A similar fusion movement was taking place in Ohio. On September 13, a convention called by the executive committee of the Workingmen's Party of Columbus, Ohio, met in that city. The convention voted to merge with the Greenback Party and form a national party, provided that the greenbackers agreed to certain conditions: the Greenback candidates nominated the previous June were to be withdrawn, new candidates were to be selected by a joint convention, and labor demands were to be added to the Greenback platform. The Greenback Party accepted these conditions, and a new convention was held. Stephen Johnson, whom the party had nominated for governor, was renominated, but the other candidates were selected from the ranks of the workingmen. A new platform was drawn up advocating repeal of the Resumption Act and the National Banking Act, and restrictions on the issuance of money by the government, a graduated income tax, complete control by the government over all corporate bodies, and the abolition of wages paid in store scrip.[72]

In New York, a Labor Reform Convention was held in Troy on October 9, which nominated an independent ticket for state officers and drew up a platform of labor reforms. John J. Junio of Syracuse, a cigarmaker and trade union leader, was nominated for the office of secretary of state; George A. Blair of New York City, a leader of the Knights of Labor, for state controller; and Ralph Beaumont, a shoemaker, for state senator. The labor demands in the platform called for a reduction in the hours of labor, abolition of the contract system of prison labor, prohibition of tenement house manufacturing, establishment of a bureau of labor statistics, and state ownership and management of railways. The financial plank favored "a currency of gold, silver, and United States Treasury notes, which should be a full legal tender for all debts, public and private,

and the retirement of national-bank bills."[73] Such a mild proposal for currency reform prevented the greenbackers from proposing merger, although at their state convention, they did place some of the Labor Reform candidates on their ticket. One of the questions asked of all candidates by both the Labor Reform and Greenback parties was the attitude they had taken during the railroad strikes.[74]

An analysis of the election returns in 1877 reveals the impetus that the Great Strike had given to the movement for independent political action by labor. The vote polled by Stephen Johnson, the Greenback-Labor candidate for governor of Ohio, was almost 17,000, more than five times the Greenback vote of the preceding year. More than half of the votes were polled in those counties which covered the industrial cities of Toledo, Cleveland, Youngstown, Canton, and Columbus; another quarter of the vote came from railway towns and industrial counties in the northeastern area of the state. In Toledo, scene of an abbreviated general strike during the July upheaval, the city ticket and some of the candidates on the county ticket were swept into office. Toledo also sent two Greenback-Labor men to the lower house of the legislature.

In Pennsylvania, the Greenback-Labor Party polled 52,854 votes, seven times more than the Greenback vote of the preceding year and nearly 10 percent of the total vote cast. The vote came mainly from the anthracite and bituminous counties, from the counties through which the Pennsylvania Railroad ran, and from those adjacent to New York, the territory of the Erie Railroad. A young labor leader named Terence V. Powderly was elected mayor of Scranton on the Greenback-Labor ticket. In 1879, he would head the Knights of Labor.

The Labor Reform Party of New York polled over 20,000 votes, ten times the vote of the Greenback Party in 1876. Steuben County, which contained the town of Hornellsville, center of the Erie strike, and Chemung County, which included nearby Elmira, gave the party 4,666 votes, or a little less than one-quarter of the total vote. Rochester, another highly industrialized area, and one of the centers of the strike on the New York Central, contributed 23 percent of the total vote.[75]

Within a year, the independent political movement stimulated by the Great Strike was to lead to the formation of a Greenback-Labor (or National) Party on a nationwide basis. It also decided the outcome of the struggle between the Marxists and Lassalleans for control of the Workingmen's Party of the United States. Dazzled by the election returns in the fall of 1877, the Lassalleans were determined to rid the party of any limitations on political action. Even though a referendum on the need for a new convention to revise the party's attitude toward political action had been rejected on October 14, 1877, the Lassallean-dominated executive committee and the Board of Control jointly issued a call for a convention to take place in Newark, New Jersey, on November 11. By the time the convention actually met, on December 26, the electoral results had strengthened the Lassalleans' position in the various sections of the Party.[76]

The "political action" socialists had a free hand at the convention, for the Marxists refused to attend. The *Labor Standard* and *Vorbote* were stricken from the list of party organs because of their pro-trade union position, and the Constitution and Declaration of Principles were completely revamped. All obstacles to immediate campaigning were removed, and the main purpose of the party, it was now asserted, was the mobilization of the working class for political action. In a subsidiary statement, it was affirmed that the party "should maintain friendly relations with the trade unions and should promote their formation upon socialistic principles." But it was made quite clear that the chief function of the party was the organization of political campaigns. Its guiding principle would be: *"Science the Arsenal, Reason the Weapon, the Ballot the Missile."*

At the Newark convention, too, the name of the party was changed to the Socialist Labor Party, bringing to an end the career of the Workingmen's Party of the United States.[77]

At its convention in September 1877, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen denounced the attacks on the strikers as "banditti," and assured the public that workingmen were not "deliberating about Springfield rifles and Gatling guns as a means of preserving

their rights: They have a more powerful and effective weapon—the ballot box." At the same time, however, the Brotherhood stressed that it was necessary to strengthen labor's other weapon—the trade union.[78]

The Brotherhood had good reason to raise this point. In the aftermath of the Great Strike, the railroad brotherhoods came close to disintegrating completely. Those members who had actively supported the strike had been discharged and blacklisted, and most of the others were confused and disheartened.[79] But slowly, along with other labor organizations, the brotherhoods began to revive. Indeed, during the very same period in which workers were so busily engaged in independent political action, the trade unions, inspired by the stirring strikes, started to attract new members. The situation described by the Cigar Makers' Union of St. Louis was typical: "The recent troubles of the country have aroused the cigarmakers of this city from their lethargy, and quite a number have joined our Association." Within a few weeks after the strike, the union was holding public meetings in St. Louis at which a campaign against tenement-house work was announced. At the same time, the trade unions of East St. Louis began to openly recruit new members at open-air meetings, to which some of the leaders of the railroad strike and the general strike in St. Louis were invited as speakers.[80]

In September 1877, the cigarmakers of New York City launched a bitter strike against the tenement-house system, for higher wages, and for recognition of the union. The police, applying the same tactics they had used in July, sided openly with the manufacturers, arresting strikers freely without placing charges against them, and beating them unmercifully on their way to jail. When the strike was broken, the Manufacturers Association publicly thanked the police commissioner.

Although the strike did not achieve its objective, it did reduce the number of cigars manufactured in the tenements and brought the issue of tenement-house manufacture to the attention of the public, preparing the ground for the final struggle against the system. In addition, the "Great Uprising" of 1877, as it was called by

the union, gained wide support among cigarmakers throughout the country and checked the relentless wage-cutting policy that had been pursued for several years in every city. It was a tremendous stimulus to organization and marked the beginning of a rapid increase in the membership of the Cigar Makers' International Union.[81]

Despite the threat of swift retaliation in the form of dismissals and blacklisting in many industries, the months following the Great Strike witnessed meetings of workers where they laid plans to rebuild their unions, shattered by four years of paralyzing depression, and even to start new ones. Yet, because of the widespread reprisals, in many cases they had to meet and operate secretly. "The recent troubles," a Pittsburgh paper reported in mid-August 1877, "have given a great impetus to the growth of secret labor organizations and workingmen by the hundreds are paying their necessary dues and taking strange oaths—but all in secrecy." Such organizations, it noted, had names like Sovereigns of Industry, and Junior Sons of '76, but the most prominent of them was called the Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor.[82]

Although it had played no role in the Great Strike, the Knights of Labor had benefited considerably in growth from the labor uprising. At its General Assembly in January 1878, the order established its first permanent national organization and began the drive to organize workers regardless of skill, sex, race, color, or nationality, which was to make it the dominant labor organization of the 1880s.[83] That same year, the Marxists, who had left the WPUS, established the International Labor Union, together with eight-hour advocates Ira Steward and George E. McNeill, to organize the unskilled workers, especially those in the textile industry, unite them with the skilled workers, and together build a new American labor movement.[84] At the same time, the Marxists played a significant role in the revival of the national trade unions, the organization of new national trade unions, and their federation for collective action. These efforts laid the foundation for the modern labor movement and produced, among other things, a federation of trade

unions that has continued, although in a different form, up to the present day—the American Federation of Labor.[85]

It is clear that although the strikers returned to work without wage increases, they did not return demoralized. At the end of the Great Strike, the British ambassador wrote to his government from Washington, D.C.: "The power wielded by the great corporations in this country is almost incredible and in their treatment of their subordinates they ignore entirely the principle that property has its duties as well as its privileges. Unless the lesson which they have now received should open the eyes of those corporations to the necessity of some radical improvement in the relations of capital to labour, I much fear that the only result of this strike will be to show the labouring classes their strength and to enable them still further to improve for future use the organization which it has now cost so much trouble and bloodshed to subdue."[86] As we have seen, this proved to be an accurate prediction. The Great Strike, which was described in the WPUS journal, *Labor Standard,* as "The Second American Revolution,"[87] became the springboard for political and trade union action by the American working class. It was able to assume this character because it was more than a strike movement against wage cuts. It was a social rebellion, the first assertion by a national working class of a common anger against a variety of grievances—years of brutal exploitation, and a system of industrialization which viewed the worker as little more than part of the machine, who could be discarded the moment he was no longer needed, and which required him to adjust to a deadening routine of work that made him practically part of the machine. It was the first real evidence of working class collective power capable of imposing its own will upon future social developments. Workers from New York to San Francisco understood, for the first time, their potential power.

"Pittsburgh," George Schilling wrote, ". . . was the calcium light which illumined the skies of our social and industrial life."[88] Writing to Friedrich Engels, Karl Marx called the Great Strike "the first uprising against the oligarchy of capital which had developed since the Civil War," and predicted that while it would be suppressed, it

"could very well be the point of origin for the creation of a serious workers' party in the United States."[89] Other contemporaries also understood the broader implications of the vast labor upheaval, but the *Washington Capital* probably put it best just a month after it ended:

> The late strike was not the work of a mob nor the working of a riot, but a revolution that is making itself felt throughout the land. The afterbirth indicates the serious nature of a nativity. Capitalists may stuff cotton in their ears, the subsidized press may write with apparent indifference, as boys whistle when passing a graveyard, but those who understand the forces at work in society know already that America will never be the same again. For decades, yes centuries to come, our nation will feel the effects of the tidal wave that swept over it for two weeks in July.[90]